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Chairman: Mr. TSHERING (Bhutan)

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AGENDA ITEM 109: REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, QUESTIONS RELATING TO REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 109: REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, QUESTIONS RELATING TO REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS (continued) (A/50/3, A/50/12, A/50/413, A/50/414, A/50/275-S/1995/555 and A/50/555)

The meeting was suspended at 10.25 a.m. and resumed at 10.40 a.m.

1. Mr. FERNANDEZ (Spain), speaking on behalf of the European Union and also Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia, welcomed the results of the regional conference on assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in the Great Lakes region of Africa, held in Bujumbura in February 1995. Nevertheless, most of the provisions of the plan of action adopted at that conference had still not been implemented. He therefore called on all States concerned to fulfil their commitments and remove all obstacles to repatriation of Rwandese and Burundian refugees.

2. Noting that there appeared to be a possibility for ending the war in former Yugoslavia, he stressed the importance of the role played by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as the humanitarian lead agency, as well as the valuable work of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and other humanitarian and non-governmental organizations. When hostilities came to an end, the European Union would continue to support UNHCR, which should remain responsible for humanitarian operations within the structures to be established. The United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), with a major European contribution, had also played a key role in facilitating the delivery of humanitarian assistance to and protection of the civilian population. Major contributions had also been made by the European Community Humanitarian Office. To ensure stability, the peace settlement should include provisions on humanitarian and human rights issues.

3. The European Union believed that international protection remained the central pillar of the mandate of UNHCR, and called on all States parties to implement fully the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol; States that had not ratified and acceded to it should do so. He noted with appreciation the UNHCR Note on International Protection, which focused on protection needs in situations of mass influx and addressed the multiple aspects involved in ensuring international protection to those persons who lacked protection from their country of origin.

4. The European Union also wished to stress the need to strengthen the protection of persons in refugee situations who were not protected under the 1951 Convention or its 1967 Protocol. It supported UNHCR in its efforts to explore further measures to ensure international protection for all who needed it, consistent with the fundamental principles set forth in international instruments. At the same time, it fully recognized the importance of regional approaches to specific protection needs.

5. The European Union appreciated the work of the Secretariat in the preparations for the regional conference on refugees and other migrants in the

countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and relevant neighbouring States. It welcomed the cooperation between UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and would continue to support that intergovernmental process.

6. As to the effect of mass displacements on children, youth, women and the elderly, he said that the European Union welcomed the progress made thus far, and commended UNHCR for its efforts to strengthen its capacity to meet their emergency and longer-term needs.

7. Stressing the importance of preventing situations that could trigger refugee flows, he called for long-term political action by the entire international community. All agencies concerned should integrate their activities into a comprehensive approach, including action in the field of early warning and prevention.

8. The European Union noted with appreciation that UNHCR had been strengthening its cooperation with the various human rights bodies of the United Nations, particularly the Centre for Human Rights. It was encouraging to note that the Commission on Human Rights had been dealing with issues of direct relevance to the work of UNHCR. The European Union remained concerned about the protection of internally displaced persons, and appealed to all parties involved to fully respect human rights and strictly adhere to the principles of international humanitarian law.

9. Referring to the question of repatriation, he stressed the need for a general political framework to stabilize internal peace and security. Countries of origin held the primary responsibility for establishing conditions that would allow for voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity. Political reconciliation must, however, be complemented by social and economic consolidation within the continuum from relief to rehabilitation. Where the main focus of a support programme shifted from repatriation to development, States could no longer expect UNHCR to do the job alone. Other agencies would have to take over the functions of lead agency. The European Union thus supported the efforts of UNHCR, development agencies, the World Bank and the regional development banks to explore possibilities for improved coordination.

10. The European Union supported the activities of UNHCR in behalf of stateless persons, and encouraged it to continue working to increase protection for stateless persons or persons facing the risk of becoming stateless as a result of the dissolution of States. UNHCR should also continue its prevention-related measures. The countries on whose behalf he was speaking considered asylum indispensable, and called upon all States to safeguard the right to seek and enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution. The effort being made to strengthen collaboration between UNHCR and the non-governmental organizations concerned with humanitarian assistance was also commendable.

11. The European Union welcomed recent decisions by the Executive Committee of UNHCR to streamline the working methods of the governing bodies, as well as the outcome of the informal consultations on budgetary issues. It looked forward to a speedy implementation of the reforms, and drew attention to the fact that

recent United Nations reports relating to oversight had highlighted a number of administrative and managerial challenges facing UNHCR, including its relations with its implementing partners. He noted with satisfaction that the Executive Committee and UNHCR had taken steps to address those issues as a matter of priority, including steps aimed at improving the accountability of non-governmental organizations working as UNHCR implementing partners. The discussions on the budget structure had also been very useful in promoting understanding of the concerns of donors, recipients and UNHCR. It was to be hoped that the changes to the budget structure would provide the High Commissioner with the flexibility to respond effectively and quickly to all operational needs, while meeting the requirements for full transparency and accountability.

12. The European Union, through its member States and the European Commission, was the most important donor to UNHCR programmes. Whereas it would continue to provide substantial support, it nevertheless wished to stress the importance of broadening the donor base and of a better sharing of financial burdens, which had not yet been achieved to a satisfactory extent.

13. Mrs. KOVALSKA (Ukraine) drew attention to the dangers inherent in humanitarian assistance activities, and urged Member States to ratify or accede to the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel (General Assembly resolution 49/59, annex), which had been adopted as the result of an initiative presented by her country.

14. Owing to its comparatively stable political and economic situation, Ukraine had become a place of asylum for thousands of persons from "hot spots" of the former USSR. Economic constraints, however, had delayed the establishment of a migration service in Ukraine. In addition to refugees from newly independent States, there had also been an increase in the number of persons arriving from the Middle East, South-East Asia and Africa. Many had arrived in Ukraine illegally with a view to moving on to countries in Western Europe. That influx had disrupted border controls and increased criminal activity. Moreover, Ukraine was facing considerable difficulty in handling problems it had inherited from the past, relating to massive violations of human rights. For decades, hundreds of thousands of people had been deported from Ukraine. Their return had raised a whole range of problems requiring immediate solution. The situation was further aggravated by the fact that Ukraine was the only successor State of the former Soviet Union that was trying to solve the problem. The 1992 CIS agreement on problems relating to deported persons had not entered into force, inasmuch as it had only been ratified by Ukraine.

15. The need to relocate a large number of people from the area affected by the Chernobyl disaster remained a major problem for Ukraine. The total number of relocated families only slightly exceeded 10 per cent of the targeted figure. Although a legal basis for migration policy had been established in Ukraine over the past few years, much remained to be done in order to ensure implementation of the legal acts and decisions adopted. Financial constraints, staff shortages and the lack of adequate equipment were hampering the process. Furthermore, the legal status of the border areas had not yet been fully clarified. Another problem was the lack of bilateral and multilateral cooperation. Ukraine had

negotiated migration issues with a number of newly independent States, but none of the agreements had been signed to date.

16. Her delegation wished to underline the importance and timeliness of the efforts of UNHCR, IOM and OSCE in preparation for the regional conference involving the countries of the CIS and neighbouring States. Ukraine was participating in the preparations, which should be kept apolitical. The final documents of the conference would serve as a basis for concluding bilateral and multilateral agreements on issues such as control of migration, cooperation in receiving and settling refugees and protection of national minorities. Implementation of the programme of action should be closely monitored by the relevant international bodies. Her Government did not believe that the creation of subregional structures, including financial ones, to deal with migration issues would contribute much to cooperation in that field. Subregional migration problems went far beyond the CIS region.

17. In view of the success of the work done by the OSCE High Commissioner for Minorities, consideration should be given to the idea of establishing a post of OSCE high commissioner for migration.

18. The opening of the UNHCR Mission in Ukraine would promote cooperation in solving the complex problems her country was facing, and would help create the necessary conditions for Ukraine to accede to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

19. Mr. AGGREY (Ghana) said that his delegation attached particular importance to the problems of internally displaced persons. It was encouraging to note that, although the mandate of UNHCR did not extend to such persons, it had increasingly addressed that problem. It would be easier and more cost-effective for UNHCR to adopt a preventive approach in order to reach desperate people within their own borders rather than waiting until they crossed international frontiers. It should be borne in mind, however, that neither UNHCR nor any other body should be allowed to use such efforts as a pretext to prevent people from reaching zones of safety outside their national borders in the event of life-threatening situations.

20. His delegation was concerned about the growing tendency on the part of certain States and people to close their doors to refugees in desperate need of asylum. The 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol specifically protected the right of refugees to seek asylum and not to be forcibly returned to their country of origin.

21. Although his Government understood the concerns of some countries that had received a heavy influx of immigrants, it believed that all asylum-seekers needed to have access to a legal system that would allow them to present their claims to refugee status. It should be possible for receiving countries to examine objectively the reasons given by immigrants when claiming a "well-founded fear of persecution". He shared the view of UNHCR that the preferred response would be for affected Governments to adopt legislation and measures to streamline status-determination procedures, shorten their duration, and distinguish at an early stage between founded and manifestly unfounded applicants, instead of closing the door to all.

22. His delegation was also concerned about the scale and complexity of recent refugee problems all over the world. Gross violations of the human rights of the affected populations, as witnessed in the territories of the former Yugoslavia, the Caucasus and the Great Lakes region of Africa, had strained the ability of UNHCR to cope with the problems involved. His delegation was also concerned about the problem of funding of UNHCR operations. The overall level of contributions to UNHCR for 1995 was still far short of its total budget. Relying on voluntary contributions did not always yield steady financial flows. Moreover, silent emergencies were often ignored; funding of UNHCR programmes should not be held hostage to grotesque publicity, as had been the case recently with the emergency in Rwanda. His delegation therefore supported the High Commissioner's appeal to the effect that, at a time when development assistance was shrinking and humanitarian needs were expanding, some sort of "third window" for financing emergency activities was required. The resources channelled into such a fund could be used for both humanitarian and development concerns, thus ensuring a predictable flow of resources for immediate rehabilitation and longer-term developmental needs.

23. Lastly, his delegation underscored the need to devise innovative emergency assistance "packages" to meet new challenges as they arose and stressed the importance of addressing the root causes of mass exoduses and maintaining the continuum of emergency relief, humanitarian assistance, rehabilitation and development in order to find a lasting solution to the problem of refugees.

24. Mr. PANG Sen (China) expressed his delegation's profound shock concerning the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin of Israel. He condemned that terrorist act and sincerely hoped that the Middle East peace process would, nevertheless, continue to move forward.

25. Turning to the problem of refugees, he noted that the irrational international economic system, the reverse flow of financial resources, the brain drain and enormous debt burdens had caused economic stagnation in many developing countries. With the end of the cold war, some developed countries sought to impose their ideologies, values, political systems and development models on the developing countries. To that end, political conditions were attached to trade and assistance. Under the pretext of promoting self-determination, some forces supported separatist activities and intervened in the internal affairs of other countries, causing political turmoil, ethnic conflict, war and large flows of refugees. Those factors were the fundamental causes of the refugee problem.

26. In order to bring about a lasting solution, it was necessary to observe strictly the Charter of the United Nations, oppose hegemonism, establish a just and rational international economic system to promote the economic development of all countries, and respect the right to self-determination, enabling all countries to choose their own political, economic and social systems.

27. Over the past year, UNHCR had done a great deal to protect and assist refugees. The refugee situation in Central America had been resolved. His Government, in its efforts to settle and assist the 280,000 Indo-Chinese refugees in China, had received valuable support from the Office, for which it expressed appreciation. China would continue to support the work of UNHCR and

was ready to join in the efforts of the international community to eliminate the root causes of the refugee problem.

28. Mrs. KABA CAMARA (Côte d'Ivoire) underscored the tragic situation of unaccompanied refugee and displaced children, who were the main victims of the civil and tribal wars that caused population movements. The host countries in Africa were confronted with mounting social and economic difficulties, the deterioration of infrastructures and the environment and a heavy financial burden resulting from reduced assistance by the international community. Ensuring security in refugee camps, particularly that of unaccompanied minors children and women, was an acute problem. Greater protection and more effective food distribution were essential. To that end, UNHCR should consider measures for increasing the number of women working in the refugee camps.

29. The general refugee situation in Africa had stabilized to a certain extent, encouraging voluntary repatriation of refugees in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Chad, Togo and Mali. Additional efforts must be made to consolidate peace, rebuild infrastructures and provide means for subsistence. Her country, which had received 120,000 additional refugees following the resumption of hostilities in Liberia in September 1994, was glad to see that the situation was stabilizing in that country.

30. Côte d'Ivoire noted with interest the preparations for convening a CIS regional conference. That integrated approach to solving refugee problems within a regional framework should be encouraged. UNHCR could draw conclusions from the results of that conference and apply them to similar situations in other regions of the world.

31. Mrs. GUSTAVA (Mozambique) said that the current refugee crisis called for concerted efforts and new measures and strategies in order to achieve lasting solutions. The increasing number of displaced persons and refugees in developing countries imposed a heavy economic burden. The plight of refugees and displaced persons in Africa was cause for serious concern, with nearly 8 million refugees and 5 million internally displaced persons living in appalling conditions. In addition to mobilizing humanitarian assistance, there was a need for an overall commitment to eradicate the root causes of refugee problems in the world. Particular attention should be given to environmental degradation and natural disasters, which were also factors causing population movements.

32. Mozambique appreciated the excellent work being carried out by UNHCR and called upon the international community to provide all the means to enable the Office to implement its programmes. The favourable conditions resulting from the climate of peace in Mozambique had led to the return of more than 1.5 million refugees. The repatriation, coordinated jointly by UNHCR, Mozambique and the countries of asylum, had been carried out smoothly.

33. Mozambique attached high priority to the resettlement and reintegration of refugees, displaced persons and demobilized soldiers. The Government was working closely with the international community to rehabilitate economic and social infrastructures with a view to normalizing living conditions and consolidating peace and stability. The presence of land-mines, however, still

impeded the large-scale resumption of agricultural activities and the free movement of persons in the areas affected by war. Accordingly, her delegation once again appealed to the international community to provide further support to complete mine clearance in Mozambique.

34. Mrs. KALAJDZISALIHOVIĆ (Bosnia and Herzegovina) said that, since the beginning of the aggression against her country, the civilian population had suffered the heaviest toll. More than 200,000 Bosnians had been killed and 60 per cent of the original population had been brutally forced to leave their homes by the forces of the Pale regime supported by Serbia. More than 1,250,000 persons from Bosnia and Herzegovina had taken refuge in more than 100 countries throughout the world. A large number of them were still in receiving centres, which were usually isolated and lacked adequate services. There were 850,000 internally displaced persons in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Ten per cent of them were living in collective centres under very difficult conditions.

35. The fall of the so-called United Nations safe areas in Srebrenica and Žepa was one of the most recent tragedies to take place in her country. Thus far, 37,000 of the persons expelled had reached the territory controlled by the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Their physical and psychological state was very vulnerable following the onslaught and the massacres. In spite of the insistence of humanitarian and human rights organizations, the Pale Serbs had refused to provide access to or information on 8,000 men, who were feared dead. The international community must take steps to bring those responsible for the atrocities before the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

36. At the same time, a new wave of ethnic cleansing had intensified in the region of Banja Luka and other areas in north-western Bosnia. More than 20,000 Bosniacs and Croats had been brutally expelled. Men had been separated and taken to unknown destinations. It was feared that there would be a repetition of the genocide that had occurred in Srebrenica and Žepa. Immediate action must be taken to bring about the immediate release of all those detained in order to guarantee the success of the current negotiations. Peace could not be negotiated when innocent civilians continued to be victims of genocide and ethnic cleansing.

37. In the past 20 months, more than 20 per cent of the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina had been liberated, thus creating the preconditions for the return of refugees and displaced persons. Her Government had recently signed an agreement with the Government of Croatia on the reciprocal return of 400 families to areas in the territory controlled by the Federation.

38. Bosnia and Herzegovina had taken steps to adapt its domestic legislation to facilitate the return of refugees and internally displaced persons. Broad cooperation had begun with host countries and international and humanitarian organizations. Plans had been drawn up for the construction of new housing and the necessary infrastructure. Her Government appealed for assistance in creating conditions for the safe, organized return of refugees and displaced persons and their reintegration.

39. Their return was essential to any future peace agreement and would demonstrate respect for human rights, the rule of law and democratic values. Those who had committed war crimes must not remain in positions of power and must be held responsible for their crimes before the International Tribunal. Otherwise, there would be no safe environment for democracy and freedom. The key was to ensure the return of the refugees and displaced persons to their homes in the very near future.

40. Mr. Kwang-Jae LEE (Republic of Korea) said that the past year had seen a marked deterioration in the international refugee situation due to the proliferation of ethnic and religious conflicts around the world. With numbers of world refugees currently at 27 million, the threat not only to the peace and stability of the regions concerned but to the world at large continued to increase.

41. A paramount goal in the national prevention and preparedness strategies advocated by UNHCR was to pre-empt situations that generated refugees by a rapid reaction to emergencies and stronger preventive diplomacy and mediation efforts. Such a strategy also called for effective interventions by UNHCR and partnerships with other United Nations agencies.

42. Safeguarding the well-being of civilians and combating intolerance against minority groups by safeguarding human rights standards was imperative. Within that context, women and children had their own protection needs. His delegation wished to emphasize the importance of the part of the draft Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, September 1995) that concerned conflict resolution and the impact of conflict on women.

43. Another key strategy was legal deterrence; his delegation strongly supported the establishment of an international criminal court for human rights violators.

44. His delegation also wished to underscore the significance of a "continuum from relief to development", which, according to the High Commissioner's report (A/50/12, para. 77), should enable humanitarian assistance to facilitate viable reintegration of displaced persons into a process of social and economic recovery. Such a strategy, however, could not succeed without the strong support of Governments and a closer coordination with United Nations agencies, international financial institutions and the relevant non-governmental organizations.

45. The prominent role which the latter had played in refugee relief services should not be overlooked. Their contributions reinforced the role of the United Nations and individual Governments whose efforts alone might not be adequate. In the Republic of Korea, for example, they had raised $1.3 million in cash and donations in kind for the refugees in Rwanda.

46. As in the cases of Mozambique, Afghanistan and Myanmar, solutions to complex emergencies required that humanitarian activities should be complemented by the political will to resolve conflicts and by development efforts to ensure a sustainable livelihood. A central element of that approach was the

maintenance of close collaboration with United Nations peace-keeping initiatives.

47. Lastly, his Government believed that the principal role of UNHCR should be enhanced, and supported the proposal to create a new post of assistant high commissioner for policy, planning and operations, while it also considered that the structure of the Executive Committee should be addressed within the context of overall United Nations reform.

48. His Government remained committed to the programmes and priorities advocated by UNHCR and had decided to increase its voluntary contribution to the Office.

49. Mr. TELLES RIBEIRO (Brazil) said that the realities of the contemporary international scene showed that the vast majority of refugees were individuals fleeing from situations of open violence within and between States. The dimensions of the problem of some 27 million refugees had tested not only the institutional and financial capacity of the mechanisms of international action, but also the humanitarian foundation upon which international cooperation in that area was based.

50. As the Secretary-General had pointed out in his report (A/50/414), the activities of UNHCR had increasingly taken on a preventive nature, stressing measures in countries of origin as opposed to an approach which sought to tackle the problem through protection and assistance after the fact. Prevention and the capacity to solve problems should continue to be the mainstay of those activities, while the international community should provide UNHCR with the capacity to intervene in refugee crisis situations and with better conditions to help the integration of refugees into receiving countries, and at the same time should support UNHCR voluntary repatriation programmes.

51. The complex nature of the refugee problem demanded more than sectoral and temporary measures to address an issue that had its origins in the legacy of colonial occupation, nationality conflicts, leftovers from the East-West confrontation and the unbalanced character of the international economic system.

52. His Government supported strong action by the international community to tackle the basic causes of the refugee problem. There was a need to address the underlying political, social and economic factors which might influence the response of States to refugee influxes and internal displacements as well as to find appropriate structural solutions for problems of development and poverty. It was also important to strengthen the existing legal regime, which might include working towards a declaration of non-binding guiding principles.

53. The international community must continue to act out of solidarity. There was a need to uphold international commitment to the institution of asylum and the principle of non-refoulement. Brazil for its part had been receiving a growing number of refugees from different areas of the world. The importance of the cooperation between the Brazilian Government and non-governmental organizations needed to be underlined, in particular the valuable work of the International Confederation of Catholic Charities (CARITAS) in Brazil. Besides providing medical assistance and social security benefits, the Government

granted entry visas, identity papers and work permits while UNHCR and CARITAS cooperated with offers of emergency financial assistance and the identification of job opportunities.

54. Mr. PEDERSEN (Observer for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) said that about 100 Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies around the world were currently involved in humanitarian work and advocacy for refugees, asylum-seekers, displaced persons and returnees. The International Federation provided one of the few comprehensive structures that directly linked beneficiaries with donors. It had a long-standing collaboration with UNHCR which it intended to continue in order to utilize collective resources in the most efficient way. Within that context, however, the International Federation, on the basis of its fundamental principles which included neutrality and impartiality, would need to maintain its independence of action.

55. The operations in the Great Lakes region and the plight of refugees in and around Rwanda had been of great concern to the International Federation. The recent decision to initiate the programme of safe return to Rwanda of refugees from Zaire must ensure the safety of the people and implementation at a pace which would enable the Rwandan authorities to receive them. The current exceptional situation must not, however, become a standard for future repatriation programmes.

56. The peace process in the former Yugoslavia must not be undermined by the untimely movement and return of populations. The International Federation endorsed the cautious strategy of UNHCR with regard to repatriation, in particular the concept of first repatriating people from surrounding countries to areas that were safe to receive them.

57. The International Federation welcomed the High Commissioner's efforts to strengthen the ability of the Office to respond to the needs of refugee women and children, an area of particular concern to it. The approach of UNHCR to protection was wide-ranging and incorporated the link between protection and assistance, and going further to include some root causes. Protection issues also needed to be linked to durable solutions.

58. Another important issue was that of anti-personnel land-mines, which continued to pose a real threat to safe return and rehabilitation. The Review Conference of the States Parties to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects, held recently in Vienna, had failed to agree on how to strengthen Protocol II on Land-mines. The International Federation hoped that the issue would be taken up again in 1996.

59. Of increasing concern to the International Federation was the duration of many refugee assistance programmes, including those in Malawi, Afghanistan and Pakistan and in the countries surrounding Rwanda. Considerable resources were tied into servicing such programmes; a more enlightened form of humanitarian funding was needed for relief and welfare activities on an appropriate time-frame basis.

60. Mr. BOREL (Observer for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)) said that, when a conflict was on the point of ending or when political negotiations had been initiated, the first concern of ICRC was to obtain the names of all detainees and access to them and then actively search for all missing persons.

61. In its activities, ICRC took account of longer-term rehabilitation requirements, but was faced with the additional problem of the repatriation and return of refugees. A cease-fire did not create the necessary conditions for a safe return; hasty decisions could revive tension. Mechanisms needed to be established for the recovery of property and fair compensation for returnees, while returns must be on a voluntary basis and be phased over time.

62. The issue of anti-personnel land-mines was vital in that context and it was regrettable that the Vienna Review Conference had not achieved tangible results.

63. For ICRC, protection meant compliance with the rules of international humanitarian law as embodied in the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Additional Protocols thereto of 1977, with their particular concern for the civilian population. Protection and assistance went together if the integrity of the victims of armed conflicts was to be ensured. Humanitarian action must be neutral, impartial and independent and perceived as such; the events of 1995 in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, however, had revealed that protection needed to be more clearly defined.

64. A better division of the work would ensure that protection was not diminished as a result of the duplication of activities. The mandates of the various humanitarian bodies, which were based on different legal systems, required a clarification of the concept and coordination of action. Protection did not depend solely on the humanitarian agencies; it was based on the political will of States to comply with international law and thus prevent the displacement of populations. Consideration of that issue would shortly be continuing at the Twenty-Sixth Conference of the International Red Cross in December 1995, which would be attended, inter alia, by representatives of the 186 States parties to the Geneva Conventions of 1949.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.